



# *The Frontline Supervisor*

*Helping You Manage Your Company's  
Most Valuable Resource - Employees*

*April 2001*

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- ◆ We are planning to terminate an employee and are worried about his possible emotional reaction at the termination meeting. Can the EAP be present at the termination in case the employee "can't handle it?"

**The EAP will probably** decline to participate in the termination interview with your employee because it would be an uninvited solicitation of a person to become a client. This violated the principle of "client self-determination,;" an ethical boundary within most helping professions. The ideas of using the EAP at a termination interview in the event an employee has an uncontrollable emotional reaction is not uncommon. Experience shows, however, that such fears by managers are usually not realized. It is appropriate to recommend the EAP at a termination interview. Managers may also find it helpful to consult with the EAP before meeting with an employee in order to help allay their fears and formulate a more effective dismissal meeting.

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- ◆ Myths and misconceptions about the EAP can interfere with employee motivation to accept a supervisor referral. What are some of these myths or misconceptions for supervisors to remember in order to help dispel them?

**Although the following** are not necessarily found among all employees or among all workforce groups, the most common myths about EAPs include: 1) a supervisor referral means that the supervisor believes you have a psychological problem; 2) a supervisor referral is a pre-step to disciplinary action; 3) a supervisor referral is for the worst employees; 4) accepting a supervisor referral means you agree with the supervisor on the cause of your performance problems; 5) the EA professional will force you to answer personal and intrusive questions; 6) the EAP will tell your supervisor about your personal problems; 7) a record of your EAP attendance and personal problems will be placed in our personnel file; 8) going to the EAP will interfere with your promotional opportunities; 9) EAPs always accept the supervisor's view of the performance problems; 10) EAPs always accept the supervisor's view of the performance problems; and 10) accepting a supervisor referral means you admit you have a psychological problem.

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- ◆ Are there commonly used guidelines for investigating incidents in the workplace associated with disturbing employee conduct?

**Investigations follow a** logical path to gather information about an event so that a reliable conclusion about what happened can be drawn. Many organizations have specific procedures to follow concerning sexual harassment and other severe events, so inquire about how to conduct these types of investigations. Consider these steps when investigating other conduct-related incidents: 1) notify your supervisor about any incident you think needs investigating; 2) interview parties separately, and in private (ask for all details, and ask for the names of any witnesses); 3) keep the information you collect confidential from others you interview – persons involved in an investigation are not entitled to the results of your interviews; 4) do not form opinions as you investigate – just write down exactly what is said and move quickly in your investigation; and 5) arrive at a conclusion – do not disclose the nature of administrative or disciplinary actions, if any, to complainants or witnesses. Consider the EAP as a resource during your investigation for yourself or others, particularly for emotionally charged events.

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- ◆ My employee has some medical problems that supposedly contribute to her lateness and quality of work. I don't see the connection. She reportedly has a doctor treating her, so is there any point in referring her to the EAP?

**You should make a referral** based on recurring performance problems. Even though your employee has a medical doctor treating her condition, this does not preclude receiving help from the EAP. Not all physicians treat medical conditions effectively. Some medical conditions are difficult to treat or may require multi-disciplinary approaches. Symptoms may continue to affect performance, or may emerge under stress. Although EA professionals are not typically medical doctors, helping employees resolve medical complaints by making referrals to specialists is common EAP practice. Some medical conditions may be associated with depression, extreme tiredness, sleep difficulties, and negative effects on attitude, motivation, initiative, and decision-making. Chronic pain, arthritis, fibromyalgia, asthma, migraine headaches, effects of head injuries, and back pain are just a few conditions that may benefit from additional EAP support.

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- ◆ Many of my employees haven't had performance appraisals in several years, so I recently scheduled all employees to have one. Suddenly, I am faced with several resignations. Could there be a connection?

**Your organization has not** prepared employees to expect accountability, so they may fear the results of a suddenly scheduled appraisal. Most employees are capable of high levels of productivity when it is expected and they feel supported. An effective performance evaluation program, of which an appraisal is a part, is a win-win process that created expectations for accountability between employer and employee. Without a performance evaluation system, employees will not get this message, and they may underperform. As a result, you will see more quality of work, attitude, conduct, and attendance problems. Even your best workers may underperform without established work goals, timely feedback, resource planning, personal development objectives, and evaluation. These are elements of an effective performance evaluation system. Involve your employees in creating a vision and the work goals. Then establish a performance evaluation system that encourages their partnership in that vision.

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### **Notes:**

***This information is intended only for the employees of your company. Please do not post it on a website that is accessible by the general public or by your company's clients.***

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